



Cornell University

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Document Title: The Language of Shell-Shock: Reading and Writing about World War I Poetry
Author: Wyatt Bonikowski

Course: English 185
Course Title: Writing about Literature: Shell shock, culture shock: World War I and English literature

Year of Award: Fall 2002

Copyright Statement:

This material is copyrighted by the author and made available through the Cornell University eCommons Digital Repository under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial License.

This document is part of the John S. Knight Writing in the Disciplines First-year Writing Seminar Program collection in Cornell's eCommons Digital Repository.
<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10813>.

→ Fall 2002 John S. Knight Assignment Sequence Prize

We are pleased to invite applications for the John S. Knight Assignment Sequence Prize. This prize of \$500 will be awarded to the teacher submitting the best sequence of writing assignments for a First-Year Writing Seminar.

Assignment sequences in a writing course are built around a series of essay topics (probably for a portion of the course). Submissions should include a rationale and a description of your plans for eliciting and responding to student drafts and revisions, as well as a description of how you ready students for each essay assignment, for example by engaging them in preparatory writing exercises, including informal writing designed to help students understand the material on which they subsequently write formal essays. Reflections on what worked well, and why, and what you would change another time, are welcome.

Submissions are due in 159 Goldwin Smith by **Wednesday, December 18**. No exceptions can be made. The winner will be announced to the Cornell community, and copies of the winning assignment sequence will be made available to all interested staff.

→ Fall 2002 John S. Knight Assignment Sequence Prize Application

Instructor's name Wyatt Bonikowski ~Please print clearly~

Department English Course # and title 185.01, Writing About Lit, Shell-shock, culture shock: WWI and English literature

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of my essay, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I am also prepared to send an electronic version of my text to the Knight Institute (knight_institute@cornell.edu).

The Language of Shell-shock: Reading and Writing about World War I Poetry
title of assignment sequence

Instructor's signature Wyatt Bonikowski
Date 12/18/02

Wyatt Bonikowski
English 185.01
Writing About Literature:
Shell-shock, culture shock: WWI and English literature

The Language of Shell-Shock: Reading and Writing about World War I Poetry

Submitted for the John S. Knight Institute Assignment Sequence Prize, Fall 2002

Stories of shell-shock—both of the general history of the illness as it erupted out of World War I and clashed with a medical establishment that couldn't understand it and of the individual stories of soldiers with the illness—have drama. The reason I decided to organize a course around this topic was that in researching the history of shell-shock while writing an essay on Rebecca West's 1918 novel The Return of the Soldier I became engrossed in the fascinating details of the cases of shell-shock and the subsequent poetry, memoirs, and novels that attempted to express something of these experiences, and I believed that students would, too. The difficulty of designing the class, I found, was that I was dealing with a complex issue on a number of fronts. How could I cover history, medicine, and literature all at once and only in one semester? Of course, I couldn't. But what I could do was introduce the students to issues that arise when these fields intersect.

Because this is an English class, and because my own approach to literature is based in close attention to language, I decided to place the focus of the class on the ways in which language attempts to communicate experience. I designed the following assignment sequence, which took us through the first five weeks or so of the class (from the first day to October 2), and organized the readings for these weeks in order to introduce the students to the central issues of the course: the experience of trench warfare

during World War I, the complexities of the term “shell-shock” and the debates around its definition, and the way in which soldier-poets such as Ivor Gurney, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen, who all in some way suffered from psychological trauma during the war, attempted to communicate their experience.

I decided that if we were going to focus on language during the course, we had better start right away. The first day of class I presented a brief overview of the material we would be looking at and some of the interesting questions we would consider. Then, I passed out a poem, Ivor Gurney’s “Strange Hells,” and we discussed what kinds of themes and issues it raised. From the first line of the poem, “There are strange hells in the minds war made,” it is obvious that Gurney is describing the effects of war on the mind, above and beyond its effects on the body. This mind/body split is essential to the shell-shock debates of World War I, with one set of doctors claiming that shell-shock was no more than a physical condition caused by damage to the central nervous system and another set claiming that shell-shock was entirely psychological regardless of the physical symptoms that arose. While we didn’t get that far into the themes of the course on the first day, the questions I asked about the poem pointed them to places in the poem where psychological experience was foregrounded. I also asked questions about the kinds of metaphors Gurney used, but the students weren’t as talkative about the specifics of the poem as they were about the general issues the poem raised. I had suspected this, and had planned already to guide them into close reading (later in the sequence).

I sent them home to do Essay #1, which asked them to write about the word “shell-shock,” the relationship between the two words that make up the term, what the term suggests to them, and how Gurney’s poem relates to the term. I asked these

questions in order to have them focus immediately on language and to begin writing about literature (which would prepare them for later, more extensive essays and would allow me to see how they wrote about literature and specifically poetry). By focusing on the pairing of two words in the word “shell-shock,” I hoped to direct their attention to the materiality of words, the way words are put together, which I hoped would begin to help them focus on specific uses of language rather than general ideas.

The responses I received were wide-ranging. They all dealt interestingly with the words “shell” and “shock,” some highlighting the contrast of the words (“shell” suggesting a seashell, for example, and “shock” electricity), others highlighting the way the words interacted with each other (a “shell” is a protective covering and “shock” breaks it open). But the responses also included other information. One student wrote about his father who treated war veterans; another about exaggerated portrayals of shell-shock in movies; and another about his own “shell-shock” in dealing with the sudden death of a close friend. The essay had given each student a forum to express sometimes quite personal information about his or her own experience; this was important to me because I wanted to establish a connection with my students and to have them understand that we all bring our own experiences to literature, which I felt would make them more engaged with the material in the course as a whole. Their writing about the poem was less interesting, however. Once again, I had expected this, and the subsequent assignments were designed with this expectation in mind.

I had planned Essay #2 as a simple comparison essay of two poems, a type of essay they might be familiar with from previous writing. But I wanted to get them interested in poetry, and specifically World War I poetry, first, believing that greater

interest would equal more interesting essays. So before I passed out the assignment for Essay #2, I passed out two short exercises on the readings we were doing for the next week. We read the first chapter-and-a-half of Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory, which I discovered made a great teaching text. It is not difficult to read and is very clear on the connection between the experience of war and the writing about the war. (It also introduced the students to a brief history of World War I and the experience of trench warfare, which I supplemented with a chronology, a brief description that I had made up of the most famous battles that we would encounter in our readings, a short video and a trip to the Cornell Library Map Collection to look at trench maps.) As well, it introduced to the students, or helped to define further for them, the concept of irony, which is the focus of Fussell's work. The first short exercise, "Sentence Exercise," was based on a list of words in two columns that Fussell provides in his first chapter: in the left column are everyday words, in the right, the equivalents of those words in a heightened "poetic" language. (For example, a friend is a "comrade.") I had them write three sentences using as many of the words from the heightened-language column as possible. Then I had them translate those sentences into everyday language by simply substituting the words from the other column. First, I wanted them to have fun with this kind of language, and most of them did, writing involved and dramatic sentences about "fallen comrades" and "rushing steeds." Then, I wanted them to have the experience of watching that language deflate before their eyes as they translated their sentences into a more direct and simple style. Many of their everyday sentences, though, were not just deflated; some of them still sounded poetic. So I took this opportunity to talk about what

poetic language means: is there only one kind of poetic language, or can even the simplest language still be poetic?

The way I had organized our reading of World War I poetry helped make my point. First we would read the heightened poetic language of Rupert Brooke, known best perhaps for the phrase from his sonnet "The Dead" describing the death of young soldiers as the pouring out of the "red sweet wine of youth." Then we would read the more direct and ironic poems of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Between these two sets of readings, though, I inserted our second short writing exercise, "Poem Rewrite Exercise," which built on the first one. This time they would translate not their own sentences but one of the poems we read: one of Brooke's poems "The Dead" or "The Soldier" or John McRae's "In Flanders Fields." The exercise also made them think more about the way poetic effects are created; they would not be able to translate the poem by means of a mere substitution of words but would have to translate the heightened effects of the poem into a more direct effect. In other words, they would have to think about what in the poem created the sense of an elevated attitude toward the subject and then think about how to change that effect into a less glorified, more direct one. They would have to think not only about words but also about rhyme, meter, and kinds of phrasing (we had discussed briefly these terms and issues in class). This exercise produced some of the most enjoyable reading for me of the entire semester; all of the students took the exercise seriously and produced some amazing poems. The most common technique of translation was to remove rhyme and meter and translate the poems into free verse; another was to rewrite all inverted phrasing in a more direct way; another to add notes of

irony to the poems to remove the sentimental effects. We then had fun reading these poems aloud in class and talking about the effects of specific changes.

This exercise prepared us for our reading of the ironic poems of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen in a number of ways: while many students reduced the heightened effects of the poems by rewriting them in free verse, the poems of Sassoon and Owen often keep to regular rhyme and meter and produce their ironic effects through these techniques; while none of the students chose to add disturbing violent images to their rewrites of the poems, one of the most striking differences between Sassoon and Owen and the other poets is the violence. These differences enabled us to talk more about how poetic techniques can be used for different effects, how a bouncy meter and rhyme scheme can be used ironically, for instance, if paired with the image of a soldier shooting himself in Sassoon's "Suicide in the Trenches."

In the assignment for their second essay I attempted to guide them in the process of creating an interesting thesis statement. In my experience, this is the most difficult task for students. They often write something general instead of a thesis statement, such as, "Although the poems are different, they are also similar in many ways." I had hoped that since we had, since the beginning of the semester, focused our discussion on the specifics of language and how language creates its effects, it would be easier for them to create interesting thesis statements. I also set up in the assignment what I hoped would be a general process for them when writing an essay, a way of creating a simple outline that would help them for each subsequent essay for the class. (In later essay assignments, I often made note-taking or outlining the first part of the assignment, which they would turn in with the essay.)

While a few students did come up with interesting things to say about the poems, many of them were still unable to create an interesting description of the poems or draw a specific distinction between them that would serve as an effective main argument. This did not surprise me; I expected to spend most of the semester guiding them toward more and more specific and interesting ways of discussing language and literature. But I also noticed two specific problems: many of the students wrote generally about the poems, with little attention to particular phrasing or poetic techniques, despite our class discussions; they also tended to separate their discussion of each poem they were writing about into different paragraphs, with little attempt to draw direct comparisons of two or more poems within the same paragraph. Having already planned to make Essay #3 a revision of Essay#2, I decided to create two revision exercises that would help solve these problems. I realized that, while we had discussed poems in detail in our class discussions, we may not have spent enough time on any one poem. The first revision exercise, then, was a close reading exercise ("Revision Exercise 1: Close Reading"). They were to read Wilfred Owen's poem "Insensibility," a long, complex poem about the way the mind and body shut down when confronted with the experience of war. On the assignment sheet I walked them through a preliminary close reading they were to prepare before the next class, so everyone would have something to say when we discussed the poem in class. The next class we spent the entire time on this poem, talking about all of the facets of the poem I highlighted on the assignment sheet. I tried to make it a point to guide them away from general statements toward more specific statements; for example, when they would say something general, I would ask where they might find that in the

language or technique of the poem. This was one of the more active classes of the semester, with most if not all of the students contributing significantly.

The next revision exercise, "Revision Exercise 2: Integrating Your Comparison," guided them through a method of comparing two poems within the same paragraph. I used two paragraphs from a student's Essay #2 which discussed two poems separately and asked the students to combine the paragraphs into one, by alternating and juxtaposing features of the poem against each other. After they had completed this exercise, I passed out another student's paragraph from Essay #2 which had done an effective job of comparing two poems within one paragraph. This was one of the most helpful writing exercises we did in class, since it gave many of the students a different way of conceptualizing paragraph construction. While at the beginning of the semester they would list their points in a series of paragraphs, talking about one work, then another, then another, toward the end of the semester, these same students were able to create paragraphs in which a number of different works were discussed in relation to a more specific point.

In the assignment for Essay #3, I required that they expand Essay #2 not only by improving the thesis by making it more specific, but also by including an extended close reading of one or both poems and an attempt at discussing the poems within the same paragraph. The results were much better: the theses were more specific and their discussion of the poems more sophisticated. The technique of juxtaposition was very helpful for most of the students, improving the flow of their ideas throughout the essay. While this essay ended the poetry unit of the course, we continued to discuss issues of close reading and comparison techniques throughout the semester. In fact, this first part

of the semester was something we always referred back to as we moved into prose; their readings of Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier, which was the penultimate text of the course, were very close and specific, building on many of the issues we had discussed when reading poetry. At the end of the course, when I asked the students what they most liked or found most helpful, a number of students told me that, while they had entered the class not liking poetry much, they had come to enjoy it and find it interesting. Spending so much time on the specifics of poetic language, and doing so in the context of the drama of shell-shock and the fascinating historical debates around the language that defined the term and the experience of the soldiers who suffered from it, allowed many students who had come to the class averse to poetry and reading closely in general to find something in the literature that interested them personally, that they could connect in many ways to their own experience, and that they could translate effectively into their writing.

Essay #1: What is "Shell-shock"? (2 pages)

In an essay of **no more than two pages**, address the following questions:

1. **What does the word "shell-shock" suggest to you?** Describe what you think the word means. Why are the words "shell" and "shock" paired together? What do the two words mean separately? How are their meanings changed when the two are made into one word? Note: You do not need to know anything about the historical meaning of shell-shock to answer this question. Please do not look the word up in a dictionary or online to help answer this question. I am not interested in factual answers; for this question there are no wrong answers. Instead, I am interested in your own thoughts about the meaning of this word. However, if you already know something about shell-shock, you may use this knowledge in your answer—but you still must describe the way the two halves of the word interact to create the meaning of the word.
2. **What might Ivor Gurney's poem "Strange Hells" have to say about shell-shock?** Using your discussion of the word "shell-shock" with which you began your essay, describe next how Gurney's poem affects your understanding of the word. For example, is there a word, phrase, or idea that Gurney presents in his poem that relates to your idea of what shell-shock means? How? Try to focus closely on the language of the poem, using words or phrases from the poem as specific examples to help answer these questions.

Further instructions: **Write an essay.** Do not simply answer the above questions in a list. Create an essay of three or four paragraphs, beginning the essay with your answer to question #1. It might help to briefly jot your answers in the form of notes before beginning your essay.

Due at the beginning of class Wednesday, September 4.

English 185.01
Instructor: Wyatt Bonikowski
September 6, 2002

Sentence Exercise

In his chapter "A Satire of Circumstance," pp. 21-22, Paul Fussell provides a list of words and their equivalents in a heightened language. You should have read through this list when reading to the end of the chapter (Monday's reading assignment), but read through it again. Get a sense of the difference between the left and right columns. Read some of the words and their equivalents aloud to get a feel for how these words sound, for example, if they were used in a poem.

Write three sentences using as many of the words from the **right column** as possible. These sentences can be separate; they need not make sense together. Have fun with it: sentence exercises can be very boring, I know, so be as creative as you want in order to make it interesting for yourself (and me—remember, I have to read them).

Then, **translate the three sentences** into the words in the **left column**. Substitute them exactly, and don't change the original word order of the sentences.

Come to class on Monday having thought about the difference between the two columns of words. How would you describe the kinds of words in each sentence? What is the difference in how your sentences sound before and after you translated them? What is the difference in their effect on an imaginary reader of these texts? How would you describe the different effects of both kinds of language? We will be discussing in class the answers to these and related questions.

Bring your six sentences ready to hand in (follow the same guidelines for submission you used for your essay).

Due at the beginning of class Monday, September 9.

English 185.01
Instructor: Wyatt Bonikowski
September 9, 2002

Poem Rewrite Exercise

This exercise is meant to build on the previous sentence writing exercise by having you “translate” or rewrite a famous World War I poem from its glorified language into a more direct style. The poems by Rupert Brooke and John McRae that you have read are, by many accounts, poems that glorify or sentimentalize war. How do they do this? What kind of language do they use in order to produce this effect? (Note: Perhaps you do not think these poems present either glorified or sentimental descriptions of war. This is fine. However, for the purposes of this exercise, try to understand why someone might describe the language of these poems as producing these kinds of effects. We can discuss on Wednesday your personal opinions as to the kinds of poems these are.)

Pick one poem to rewrite. Attempt to produce the opposite effect by translating the glorified language of the poem into a more direct style. Think back to the sentence writing exercise: are there any “heightened” terms in the poem that could be replaced with more common, everyday terms? What other techniques does the poet use to produce the glorified effect? How can you translate those techniques so that the new version of the poem has the opposite effect?

Feel free to rewrite the poem entirely. You do not have to keep to the same language, rhyme scheme, or meter. You can write in free verse. The poem can be much shorter than the original (or longer, but try not to go overboard). In any case, the translation of your poem should be a recognizable version of one of these poems; when you read it aloud to the class, the class should know which poem you have translated.

Come to class prepared to read aloud. (Not everyone will be able to read his or her poem, but we’ll try to have as many as are willing to do so.)

Due at the beginning of class Wednesday, September 11.

Essay #2: World War I Poetry (3-4 pages)

The purpose of this essay is for you to compare two or more poems. All essays must compare at least one of the poems from the Brooke/McRae cluster with at least one of the poems from the Sassoon/Owen cluster. Although this is a comparison essay, the main point of your essay (your “thesis” or “argument”) cannot be simply that the poems are different. I don’t want to see any essays with a thesis like this: “Although the poems are different, they are also similar,” or “Although the poems both talk about World War I, they talk about the war in different ways.” **You must make an argument about the poems, a general statement that says something interesting about them.** You do not have to construct a “thesis statement,” a one-sentence summary of your main point. You can describe your main point in as many sentences as it takes—this is what the first paragraph of your essay is for. Approach your essay in this way:

1. Before starting the essay, jot your ideas down in relation to the following questions: how would I describe each poem on its own? What kind of effect does the poem have on the reader? How does the poem produce this effect? What kinds of words or techniques does the poet use to make this effect?
2. Now that you have a general description of each poem, compare them (you still haven’t started writing the essay yet—these are just notes). How are they different? What techniques or uses of language are different between them? Can you think of a general way of describing the difference between the two poems? Perhaps Paul Fussell’s ideas about irony might help you. Are the poems ironic? How? Maybe one is ironic and the other is not. (You do not have to limit yourself to irony—I’m just using it as an example.) In other words, try to find a general way of describing the difference between the two poems. This general description will serve as your argument.
3. With this argument in mind, begin writing your essay. **Be sure to make your argument—the general point of your essay—clear in the first paragraph.** Use the remaining paragraphs of your essay to analyze the poems you’ve decided to compare, describing the features of the poems that support your main idea.

The purpose of this essay is to analyze poetry and to begin learning how to describe poetry’s different effects. **Be specific in your analysis.** Refer to specific words, phrases, techniques, etc., in the poems themselves. **Essay AND preliminary notes (# 1 & #2) due at the beginning of class Wednesday, September 18.**

Revision Exercise 1: Close Reading

In preparation for Essay #3, which will be a substantial revision of Essay #2, we will be doing a couple of revision exercises this week. The first is an exercise in what is usually referred to as "close reading," that is, reading a short passage from a text, or in this case a poem, as closely as possible to wring as much meaning from the text as you can. Normally when we read, we read only closely enough to derive the general meaning of the text (or sometimes we even skim—but not in this class). However, when writing an essay on works of literature, which requires that you not only formulate an interesting argument but also prove your argument effectively using specific examples from the text, it is good practice to do a close reading of the text or texts you are writing about. This exercise should help you begin to develop the tools necessary to read a text closely.

1. Before class on Wednesday, read Wilfred Owen's poem "Insensibility." Don't just read it once or twice; read it at least three or four times before you move to #2.
2. The form of the poem: Is there a rhyme scheme (remember Owen's penchant for off-rhymes or slant rhymes)? If not, what words seem to rhyme? Is there a regular meter (syllables per line)? If not, is there some kind of pattern to the meter? How many stanzas are there? Are they of the same form or are they different? Why does Owen divide the poem in this way? Is each stanza saying something different? How are the stanzas related? Why are they numbered (many of Owen's poems have stanzas but they're not often numbered)?
3. Rhythm and sound: Read the poem aloud (no really, read it aloud). Mark lines that are difficult to read or that you stumble over. What makes them difficult? (Think of sound, not meaning.) Are there too many similar sounds, too many different sounds, sounds that don't go smoothly together? Read the poem aloud again. Pick five or six lines that interest you and mark the words that contain similar sounds. There may be consonants that repeat (a repetition of t's, for example), or vowels. Are these sounds exactly the same or is there a slight difference?
4. Meaning and rhythm: Work out the literal meaning of Owen's poem. Owen is good at using sentence structures and words in odd ways, sometimes obscuring meaning. Underline words you don't know, and look them up. Underline words you do know but which are used in ways you don't understand. Keeping in mind what you thought about when doing numbers 2 and 3 above, think about the meaning of the poem in relation to the various formal, rhythmic and sonic effects Owen uses. Is there a relationship between what Owen means (and what words he uses) and the kinds of techniques and effects he employs? What is this relationship?

Make notes as you follow the steps above, in whatever way is most convenient for you. While I won't be asking you to hand in your notes, I will be asking you to do a close reading in Essay #3.

Come to class Wednesday, September 25, ready to discuss Owen's poem. We will use the entire class time for a communal close reading.

English 185.01
Instructor: Wyatt Bonikowski
September 25, 2002

Revision Exercise 2: Integrating Your Comparison

This is the second exercise in preparation for Essay #3, which corresponds to point #2 on my handout for Essay #3. In this exercise we will experiment with integrating a comparison of two poems into a single paragraph. Why are we doing this? If you divide your discussion of the texts you are comparing into separate paragraphs, it is more difficult to explain the relationship between the texts. An effective comparison essay makes its points by juxtaposing the texts, playing off their characteristics, which is most easily done by discussing the texts in the same paragraph.

To make this easier on you, I will be emailing you the material you will be working with. This evening, around 7 pm, I will send you two paragraphs from one of the essays you wrote (it will be anonymous), which describe two poems separately. Read these paragraphs. How would you make these two paragraphs into one?

Experiment by simply cutting and pasting the sentences of one paragraph into the other without changing any of the words. Try to insert them meaningfully into the same paragraph so that it makes as much sense as it possibly can.

Now begin to rewrite it. Think about the connections between the sentences that discuss different poems. How can you explain the connections? Is there anything you need to add? To take out? Do you need more quotes from either poem? Do any other points occur to you that relate to the points already expressed in the paragraph? Write them in. What is the main point of this paragraph? Is it clear? If not, make sure the first sentence presents the main point clearly. Read through the paragraph from beginning to end, making sure that each sentence flows logically from one to the next.

After writing the new, single paragraph, think about the next point you would make if you continued writing this imaginary essay. Write the first sentence of the next paragraph, making sure to use a smooth transition. How do you do this? Think about the relationship between the point in the paragraph you've just written and the next paragraph you would write. What is the connection between the two points? How would you describe that connection? Some of the most common ways to write this kind of a transition sentence involve using constructions like "While," "Even though," "Although" and "Not only . . . also." For example: "While the two poems use similar rhyme schemes, their overall effects are much different" or "Not only do the poems treat death differently, they also imply different attitudes towards the people at home."

When you have a full paragraph, plus the first sentence of the next paragraph, make sure your name is on it, print it out, and bring it to class to hand in.

On Friday I will pass out a separate example of a paragraph (again, an anonymous one) that integrates a discussion of two poems well and includes a good transition in the next paragraph.

Due at the beginning of class Friday, September 27.

Paragraphs for Revision Exercise 2

Thesis (paraphrase of the author's intro): Propagandist sentiment, for example in the poem "In Flanders Fields," written early in the war, is made obsolete by the kind of poetry written later in the war, exemplified by "Dulce et Decorum Est."

"In Flanders Fields," written in 1915 in the year after the war started, is a perfect example of an early war poem. It is a very lofty and innocent portrayal of the soldiers' view towards things, never portraying the atrocities of war but only the ideals they hold. Propagandist in effect, this poem attempts to make the next generation of fighters to enter the war feel that they have an obligation to fight. It neglects to show the evil that these soldiers must commit to fulfill this obligation. In its own time, this poem is a quite effective poem. It would be read as an obligation to volunteer and accept "the torch." It might have even motivated the occasional soldier who had a tendency to be cowardly to show some strength. How could someone "break faith with" their fallen soldiers and not allow them to "sleep"? It puts a direct pressure on the reader to go to the front and "Take up our quarrel with the foe."

"Dulce et Decorum Est" is a different story altogether. Written in 1917 after the introduction of gas warfare, Wilfred Owen depicts a much more realistic picture of the war. The reader gets a feeling of the soldiers' experience, without any idealism. There is no goal to coerce people into joining the war effort; it is purely a descriptive poem of the atrocities of the trenches and the gas. If someone earlier in the war had read this poem, it might have been discarded as too morbid and disgusting. He might not have even believed that war was that awful. If one has any idealistic views of the war, they are thoroughly thwarted by the descriptions in "Dulce." How could one possibly want to join the war effort when there is a risk of "blood / com[ing] gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs"?

Example of Integrated Comparison and Transition

Thesis (paraphrase of the author's intro): Sassoon's "Does it Matter?" presents an ironic view of the war by using a sing-song rhyme scheme and optimistic language. Brooke's "The Dead" uses similar techniques but produces a more naïve meaning. Nonetheless, its ultimate effect is still ironic: not the self-conscious irony of Sassoon, but the unintended irony caused by the distance between the reality of the war and Brooke's glorified vision.

The similarities between the two poems are brought to light through careful examination of the literary techniques used by the authors, specifically, the simplistic rhyme scheme and positive tone. Although the rhyme schemes in the works are not identical, they are noticeably similar enough to each have the same effect on their respective poems, "The Dead" consisting of an a-b-b-a-c-d-d-c pattern, and "Does it Matter?" of an a-b-b-c-a pattern. One of the most noticeable aspects of the above rhyme schemes is their amazingly upbeat rhythms. In addition, the rhymes are vaguely reminiscent of children's nursery rhymes, and seem to have an almost juvenile tone about them. This juvenile quality imparts upon the serious subject matter of the poems an ironically innocent feeling. This pleasant and innocent tone is further enhanced in Brooke's "The Dead" through use of heroic language and overly romanticized metaphors. For example, the valiant-sounding metaphor "the red sweet wine of youth" serves as a replacement for "the blood of young men," a far less appealing image. Similarly, the phrase "... and those who would have been, their sons, they gave, their immortality" attempts to add romantic appeal to death by illustrating it as an honorable gift rather than a violent and terrible fate. Additionally, use of the heroic word "immortality" serves to persuade the reader that a death on the field is an admirable death, perhaps also suggesting that any other death would be less than worthy. Along the same lines, Sassoon's "Does it Matter?" maintains its positive tone through use of pleasant and straightforward language. For example, the line "Does it matter? – losing your legs? For

people will always be kind” is seemingly reassuring, and may even be interpreted as a statement of bravery. Likewise, the line “You can drink and forget and be glad” attempts to downplay the gravity of war simply by painting a pleasant post-war scene. In doing so, it also implies that war is just a passing thing, and that one can return to normal life after wartime experiences. When examined individually, the above quotes from “Does it Matter?” seem to offer an uplifting viewpoint on war. In its entirety, however, Sassoon’s poem takes on a much more sarcastic tone; Sassoon ironically twists the optimism of the individual lines of his work into cynical descriptions of the reality of war.

When read as a whole, Sassoon’s “Does it Matter?” obviously conveys a cynical attitude not only toward war, but also toward those who attempt to diminish the seriousness of war and its effect on people’s lives.

Essay #3: "Re-vision" of Essay #2 (5-6 pages)

Revision is not just editing. It is not enough to go through your paper and make basic corrections without making the ideas in your essay more interesting. Think of revision as "re-vision," that is, a re-seeing of your essay: see it in a new way. Revision is about re-conceptualizing your essay so that it is more interesting, more effective, and has more of an impact on your reader. When I read your revision, I will not only be looking for the things listed below, but also for how substantially you conceive your essay in a new light.

To help you re-see your essay in a productive way, I will have you do two revision exercises this week (see #1 and #2 below, and separate handouts). Essay #3, while based on Essay #2, must contain the following things:

1. A close reading of one of the poems you wrote about. Pick the poem that you think will support your main idea the best. Your close reading should include only what is important to your main argument. For example, if you write about meter and rhythm, you should not simply describe them; instead, you should describe **how** the meter and rhythm work in the poem to produce an effect that supports your main argument.
2. Integration of your comparison of the poems. If in Essay #2 you separated your discussion of the poems you compared (that is, if you wrote first about one poem, and then about the other), in Essay #3 make sure that you integrate your discussion of the poems (see integration exercise handout). In other words, compare the poems together, within the same paragraph, as you move from point to point.
3. An effort to address the comments I've made on Essay #2, changing or elaborating as needed. Pay attention especially to those comments that deal with general structural and organizational issues, your main argument, or elaboration of your points, and use these comments to revise or elaborate on your main argument or points. Don't pay as much attention to comments I've made about sentences or particular words or phrases. I make those kinds of comments not so that you will change them specifically for your revision, but so that you will know if you've used a word incorrectly or made a grammatical mistake. I say this so that you will not feel limited by the words you've already written and to encourage to rewrite and change as much as you need to make your essay as a whole more effective.

Due at the beginning of class Wednesday, October 2.